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## AN ACCOUNT OF THE STATUE CALLED CHAC-MOOL, DISCOVERED IN YUCATAN BY DR. AUGUSTUS LE PLONGEON.

BY STEPHEN SALISBURY, JR.

At the semi-annual meeting of the American Antiquarian Society, held in Boston, April 26, a paper on this subject was presented by the writer, explanatory of photographs purchased from the agent of Dr. Le Plongeon, which were then exhibited, and descriptive of the pictures of an entire statue found at the mines of Chichen-Itza, Yucatan. Since that date, communications from Yucatan, in regard to this discovery, have been received, and the present article, containing this new matter, is offered to the American Geographical Society for their consideration, with the hope that the attention of archæologists may be called to this discovery and to its connection with the early inhabitants of the continent, and also to direct notice to the labors of the indefatigable Dr. Le Plongeon in this field of inquiry.

The success attending the excavations of Dr. Schlieman in the Troad and at Mycenæ, and of M. di Cesnola at Cyprus, has been successfully emulated among the ruined palaces of the Mayas in the province of Yucatan. Dr. Augustus Le Plongeon, an archæologist and an enthusiastic traveler, a native of the Island of Jersey, but of French parentage, has discovered an entire statue, which he has excavated (in 1875) from a depth of 30 feet in a building at Chichen-Itza, an ancient and ruined city of Yucatan, 108 miles south-southeast from Merida, the capital, and 2½ miles west from Valladolid, the chief town of the eastern portion of the state.

The statue, as shown in my photographs, is cut from a solid block of stone (limestone probably), measuring a little more than nine feet in length, and weighing 12,500 to 15,000 pounds. It is of herculean proportions and of very superior workmanship, and represents a man reclining upon a pedestal apparently cut from the same block of stone as the figure. The attitude of the statue is commanding, and is suggestive of a degree of unrest, as if about to rise from its recumbent position. The knees of this figure are drawn up, and the elbows rest upon the pedestal. The face is turned and looks over the right shoulder, and the head is protected by a peculiar covering surrounding it like a fillet. The drapery of the body seems to consist of broad bands across the chest, upon the arms and just below the knees, and the feet are shod with sandals similar to those now worn by the Indians in that country. The face bears a strong likeness to a photograph of a face in bas-relief from the ruins of Texmal, but in most respects this statue differs from the previously discovered sculptures of the Yucatan peninsula, and it is regarded with great admiration and wonder by the people of that country. It does not resemble the idols which have been found there, which are draped with trappings and weapons, nor does it resemble the bas-reliefs nor the paintings, which depend more on costume than on skillful anatomical proportion for their effect; but it appears to be an independent construction, finished "in the round" in the same way that our sculptors represent the likenesses of living men. While the other sculptures present a partial view only by lines on a flat surface, or at most are in alto, basso or messo rilievo—the idols being almost the only sculptures finished "in the round,"

with generally a smooth and unfinished reverse—this statue appears complete in itself, courting examination upon all sides.

The statue of Chac-Mool, or "Tiger-king," as it is called by its discoverers and by common consent, was brought to the city of Merida on March 1 of this year; and an idea of the importance with which its discovery and acquisition was regarded by the inhabitants of that city, may be obtained from the following extract from an editorial article in the *Periodico Oficial* of March 2, 1875:

"Yesterday morning the statue of the Tiger-king Chac-Mool was brought to the city by the Commission which, under the orders of C. Juan Peon Contreras, Director of the Museo Yucateso, had been sent to search for it in the midst of the forests bordering upon the town of Pisté. The Governor-General, Protasio Guerra, presided over the occasion in an open carriage accompanied by the Counsellor of the State and the Political Judge. Next came the Commission in charge and their carriage was followed by many others and by a procession of citizens. The lyceums and the municipal schools also took part, and great satisfaction was occasioned by the spectacle of the children who came together to participate equally in this triumph of science. At the entrance of the colossal statue into the street of Porfirio Diaz, the military band played "The Hymn of the State." Compact lines of ladies and gentlemen occupied the two sidewalks of the street as far as the Central Park. As the statue passed before the Society "La Siempre Viva," Isabel Ciresol, a graduate of the Lyceum, recited a beautiful poem. Then the statue continued its triumphal passage, stopping in the middle of the street between the Park and the porch of the Catholic temple of Jesus, where it remained until the afternoon, when it was carried into the porch of this church for public exhibition until such time as it shall be placed in the position intended for it in the Museum. During the time that it remained in the street two addresses were made, and an ode suited to the occasion was recited.

"The statue of Chac-Mool measures a little more than nine feet in length. Its beautiful head is turned to one side in a menacing attitude, and it has a face of ferocious appearance. This precious object of antiquity is worthy of the study of thoughtful men. History and archæology in their grave and profound investigations will certainly discover the secret which surrounds all the precious monuments which occupy the breadth of our rich soil, an evident proof of the ancient civilization of the Mayas now attracting the attention of the Old World. The entrance of the statue of Chac-Mool into the capital will form an epoch in the annals of Yucatan history."

A letter from Señor David Carases to the writer, dated Merida, March 8, contains the following allusion to this statue: "Now that we talk about antiquities, it is not amiss to tell you that Mr. Augustus Le Plongeon has been of late studying our ruins, and has recently found at a distance of 30 feet under ground, near one of the principal buildings of Chichen-Itza, a colossal statue of the Tiger-king (Chac-Mool in Maya), which statue is now in the Museo Yucateso. Such statues and of that size are very rare in our ruins, and I suppose this will be a fit subject for the study of antiquarians." The writer is in possession of a memorial on the subject of the discovery of the statue, written by C. Juan Peon Contreras, Director of the Museo Yucateso, and never before published. It is addressed to the Provisional Governor of the State of Yucatan, and is entitled: "A Short Historical Notice of the Stone Image Chac-Mool, Discovered in the Celebrated Ruins of Chichen-Itza, by the Learned Archæologue Mr. Le Plongeon." The memorial notices the fact that the ruins of Chichen-Itza, 36 leagues from Merida, have been hitherto but little visited on account of their situation in a district occupied by hostile and revolutionary Indians (*Sublevados*), and that in the latter part of the year 1874, Dr. Le Plongeon and his wife fixed their residence there for some months, busying themselves with taking photographic views of whatever they found most worthy of notice. "They passed their days in producing exact plans and transferring to paper the wall-paintings that are still preserved upon some of the edifices, such as Acabsib—signifying 'dark writings.'" Finally, Dr. Le Plongeon

became convinced that he was upon the eve of an important discovery, the exact particulars of which he will give when he publishes the interesting work which he is preparing about his scientific investigations in the ruins of Yucatan.

The discovery of the statue is thus detailed: "*Chac-Mool* is a Maya word, which means 'Tiger,' so the discoverer chose to name it, and he reserved to himself his reasons. He discovered an oblong, somewhat imperfect vase of stone, measuring 9 inches in thickness by  $27\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length and 34 inches in width. Above the vase reposes the colossal image in a single block of stone weighing 12,500–15,000 pounds. Its imposing and majestic attitude and the insignia which adorned it, lead to the supposition that it was some noble leader of the time—a king or noble. It was reached at a depth of 8 metres, not far from the manorial castle of Chichen. According to the discoverer, there exists a kind of mausoleum or monument erected to the memory of Chac-Mool by the queen, his wife, in which the statue was preserved, and at a short distance from this place was found a stone statue, representing a tiger,\* which, it is presumed, surmounted the mausoleum. By means of a trestle-work of trunks and limbs of trees, and employing a capstan, with ropes made from the bark of the grapevine, Dr. Le Plongeon succeeded in lifting from its depository and landing upon the ground the most noteworthy archæological treasure ever discovered in Yucatan. Ignorant of the laws of the country, this American traveler thought he might at once consider himself the owner of the statue, and succeeded, in 15 days, in bringing it as far as the uninhabited town of Pistó, two miles from the ruins, and there he concealed it while he might inform himself about his supposed rights; but the government of the state had, in the meantime, decided that the statue was the property of the nation and not of the discoverer. Thereupon Dr. Le Plongeon occupied himself in visiting other ruins, leaving for a better opportunity the question of ownership of the statue."

Señor Contreras then gives an account of his own agency in the recovery of the statue, in which he was assisted by an armed military force necessary for an expedition of a dangerous character. We left Merida on February 1, 1875, and opening a road six leagues in length over a surface covered with mounds and inequalities, and placing the statue upon a wagon, it was drawn by more than 150 Indians in relays. The natives, in their fanatical superstition, asserted that during the late hours of the night there came from the mouth of the figure the cries *Conex! Conex!* signifying in their language, "Let us go! let us go!"

"Upon the 26th of February the statue was received in the historical and monumental town of Izamal with enthusiastic demonstrations, and the speeches and poems offered on this occasion have been printed in the form of a pamphlet. When it arrived in Merida, a no less lively reception was accorded to it upon the 1st of March. Soon after, by decision of the Governor, the transfer of the statue to the National Museum at Mexico was permitted, with the understanding that a plaster copy of Chac-Mool should remain in the possession of the Museo Yucateso, which copy should be made by a skillful Yucatan artist. But the unexpected arrival and early return of the national war-steamer '*Libertad*,' sent by the government to bring the statue to Mexico by way of Vera Cruz, gave no time to secure this copy, and the request of the Museo Yucateso for such a copy will be presented to the President of the Republic as an inadequate substitute for the original."

The above memorial of Señor Contreras, and the public ceremonies which took place at the town of Izamal and in the city of Merida on the reception of this statue, testify the profound admiration with which this discovery of Dr. Le

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\* In the collection of photographs from Chichen-Itza, taken by Dr. Le Plongeon, is a picture representing the stone statue of a tiger.

Plongeon is regarded by the scholars of Yucatan, accustomed all their lives to look upon the ruins of an earlier civilization covered with bas-reliefs, hieroglyphics and paintings.

A search for a description of an American statue which resembles that of Chac-Mool results in finding an account of two similar statues described by Bishop Diego de Landa, the second Bishop of Yucatan, which he saw at the ruins of Chichen-Itza. The account from which the extract below is taken is entitled "Relacion de las Choses de Yucatan," and was written in 1866. The manuscript was found by Brasseur de Bourbourg, at Madrid, and was copied by him from a copy of the original made 30 years after the death of Landa. Bishop Landa says: "I found there also two men cut in stone of a single piece, each of high stature, *en carnes cubierta en honestidad*, according to the usages of the Indians. They held their heads in a peculiar manner, with pendants hanging to their ears, which were inserted into a deep hole made on purpose after the usage of the country, forming a cluster behind the neck; and thus adorned, the statue was complete." Later explorers have failed to mention the existence of these statues, and it is probable that they have disappeared, while the original position of the statue of Chac-Mool, as shown in the photographs, would preclude the idea that this statue could have been buried to a depth of 30 feet after the Spanish invasion.

The attention of the writer was first called to this subject by the admirable annual address of Chief-Justice Daly, delivered on the 16th of January, in which he notices the labors of Dr. Le Plongeon, and also the valuable photographs of Yucatan ruins, which were for sale in New York. This collection of 125 photographs is now in possession of the writer and consists of portraits of Dr. Le Plongeon and his wife, eight photographs of specimen sculptures, seven photographs of the ruins of Aké, twelve photographs of Yucatan Indians, 60 photographs of the ruins of Uxmal, and 36 photographs of the ruins of Chichen-Itza, including twelve views relating to the discovery of the Chac-Mool statue. In addition to the above, relics, said to be taken from the excavation where the statue was found called the tomb of the chieftain Chac-Mool, are now in the possession of the writer, together with letters of Dr. Le Plongeon concerning the photographs, the discovery of the statue and of the relics. These relics consist of an ornamental urn of pottery and two dishes of the same material, flint arrow-heads of superior workmanship, and jade points of a peculiar form.

In the same collection of curiosities were fossil shells found in excavations, which may assist in determining the period when the ancient buildings were erected. Besides there were flint lance-tops and stone axes from the island of Cozumel.

Bishop Landa says in his *Relacion* (p. 199): "As to seigneurs and people of superior condition, they burn their remains and deposit their ashes in large urns. They build afterwards temples over them as one sees they anciently did by what is found at Izamal." Here there is ground for the belief that the statue of Chac-Mool was the representation of some Itza king or high dignitary, and that the building beneath which his statue was found was his tomb, where his ashes as well as his semblance found repose. The ruins of Chichen-Itza are first mentioned in the records of the expedition of the Adelantado Montijo,\* undertaken in the year 1527, for the conquest and purification of Yucatan. This place was then famous for its beautiful and strongly constructed buildings, which served both the natives and Spaniards as fortifications, and also for two large *senotas* or ponds which supplied the place with water. Landa says: "The Indians had as great veneration for Cozumel and the wells of Chichen-

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\* Historia de Yucatan. By Diego Lopez de Cagolludo. Merida, 1815, p. 87.

Itza, as we have for pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to Rome." The original Maya name of this place has been retained to this day; *Chichen* meaning "mouth of wells," and *Itza* being the name of a branch of the Maya people, or of a royal family, which played a most important part in Yucatan history. This place was taken possession of and occupied by Montijo about this time; but it does not appear whether the town was inhabited by Indians at the time of its discovery. The Spaniards were forced, after a time, to give up the occupation of Chichen-Itza, to withdraw secretly by night from the place, and ultimately, in 1535, from Yucatan.

The probable locality where the statue of Chac-Mool was discovered by Dr. Le Plongeon is indicated, in the absence of any written description, by a comparison of his photographs with the engravings of buildings at Chichen-Itza, in Stephens' "Incidents of Travel in Yucatan,"\* and in Chomay's "Ruines Americaines." We find a picture of a ruin, called by Stephens the "gymnasium," by the natives the "church," and by Chomay the "circus." Stephens says of the building: "It [the gymnasium] consists of two immense parallel walls, each 274 feet long, 30 feet thick, and 120 feet apart. [Here begins a description of the building where the statue was excavated.] At the southern extremity of the eastern wall, and on the outer side, stands the building [a picture of which he gives as a part of, and the southeast corner of, the easterly wall above-mentioned]. It consists of two ranges, one even with the ground, and the other about 25 feet above it, the latter being in a good state of preservation, simple, tasteful in its arrangements, and having conspicuous a procession of tigers or lynxes, which appear upon a small scale in the engraving. From its lofty position, with trees growing around it and on the roof, the effect is beautifully picturesque, and it has besides a far higher interest, and on some consideration may, perhaps, be regarded as the most important structure that we met within our whole exploration of ruins. The lower building standing on the ground is in a ruinous condition; the front has fallen in, and shows only the remains of two columns covered with sculptural figures. The fall of the front has laid bare the entire wall of the chamber, covered from one end to the other with elaborately sculptured figures in bas-relief. In the upper building is presented, though broken and disfigured, perhaps the greatest jem of aboriginal art, which on the whole continent of America now survives." This jem consists of a chamber, the walls of which are covered from the floor to the peak of the arch, with designs in painting, representing in vivid colors human figures, battles, houses, trees and scenes of domestic life, and conspicuous upon one side is a large canoe.

The photographs relating to Chac-Mool are a series of twelve pictures, six of which represent the statue in its various conditions from its situation in the deep excavation to the time when it was placed upon wheels for transportation, and they exhibit the engineering process by which it was lifted from its original bed. The other six photographs show the building where the statue was found, and the various sculptures and hieroglyphics connected with it. This series of twelve views was attached to a sheet of card-board labeled by Dr. Le Plongeon, "Chichen-Itza Ruins, Grand Discovery of Chac-Mool Statue." The locality cannot be mistaken, as, on comparison, it is found to agree in all respects with the picture of the building upon the southeast corner of the so-called gymnasium wall.

The following facts have been learned in regard to Dr. Augustus Le Plongeon, who is still occupied in scientific investigations in Yucatan, a region which Brasseur de Bourbourg wrote "appeared to him destined to return the

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\*Travels in Yucatan. By John L. Stephens. New York, 1860. Vol. 11, pp. 303, 308.

greatest results to the historian and archæologist of any part of America." Dr. Le Plongeon was born on the Island of Jersey, and was educated at Paris. He went to California in 1849, as an engineer, and there laid out the town of Marysville. Thence he went to Peru and traveled with Mr. Squier, acting as his photographer. Dr. Le Plongeon visited Yucatan in 1873, since which time he has been occupied in archæological studies and investigations there, and in exercising his skill as a photographer.

The letters of Dr. Le Plongeon are written in English, and are very interesting. One of his letters, dated Merida, Yucatan, August 30, 1876, is addressed to General Hawley, President of the Centennial Commission, and gives his reasons for not sending the statue of Chac-Mool to the Exhibition, as he had intended, which were, as we know, that he failed to obtain the permission of the government. He says: "I send photographs of the monuments of Chichen-Itza, Uxmal and Aké, also of the discovery of the greatest piece of sculpture ever known of ancient America; of the engineering work, executed without tools or machinery to extract it from the place where it laid buried at a depth of eight metres. I also send photographs of the bas-reliefs that once adorned Chac-Mool's sepulchre. These, I think, equal to those found by Layard, Botia, and others in the palaces of Kouyunjik (Nineveh) and Babylon. I also send pottery found in the mausoleum with ashes and some jade ornaments near the head of the statue in a heavy stone urn. Also two dozen arrow-heads used by the great chieftain Chac-Mool, whose history I read in the hieroglyphics and paintings. I sincerely hope that you will assign to these works, poor as they are, a place in the Exhibition, where they can be studied by the scientific men of all countries now in Philadelphia. Pray, in the name of science and history, tell them that it is no fault of mine, if I do not present them the originals instead of the photographs. The fact is the world has been deprived from admiring the beauties of ancient American art in a safe place out of all danger, to have them hidden yet by me in the depths of the forest. I feel really sorry not to have been able to present to your vision the material proof of the high civilization obtained by some of the inhabitants of America, and of Yucatan in particular. I also send you a small collection of interesting fossil shells. These are the only fossils of living beings found to the present day, that I know of, in the rocks of this peninsula."

A private letter from the same source to a friend in New York, dated Merida, October 31, 1876, has the following: "I returned from the wilds two months ago, after an absence of more than two years from the city of Merida. What I have done during that time in the woods, in deserted cities, surrounded on all sides by countless dangers, is more than I have time now to relate in a simple letter. An examination of my beautiful collection of photographs will tell you far more than I could do by words. Alice [his wife] and myself have worked like slaves. When, in December last, we discovered the greatest master-piece of statuary of ancient America, the great, the magnificent statue of Chac-Mool, an Itza king, we stretched every nerve to open roads through thick forests to bring it to a highway. We were fifteen miles from any village, in a place where the inhabitants of the country do not dare venture even in large numbers on account of the hostile Indians. Often we had nothing to eat, or perhaps only a hard corn pan-cake, yet we toiled day after day, and after raising my colossal statue to the surface of the earth from the deep bed where it laid at eight metres under the soil (see my memorial to the Mexican government), when I had already six miles of road, six metres broad, opened, the State government ordered my men to be disarmed. That, of course, stopped my work effectually. My boys and ourselves were left exposed to a sudden attack of the hostiles, and to be chopped to pieces by them, having no other means of defense than the cutlass. I was

then obliged to abandon my treasures in the woods when we were rejoicing at the thought of carrying them for the admiration of the world at Philadelphia. Well, seeing our hopes of carrying Chac-Mool to the Exhibition were blasted, we came to Merida, and then again worked—yes, worked day and night—to send at least our photographs. In a day or two I start for another somewhat hazardous expedition. Next you may hear from me from the Island of Maugeres, or, perhaps, Belize.”

Neither the photographs nor the relics of which Dr. Le Plongeon speaks were exhibited at Philadelphia, because their delivery was too long delayed. The statue of Chac-Mool is now probably in the National Museum of Mexico.

Another interesting letter is dated Isla de Maugeres, coast of Yucatan, December 12, 1876. It gives an account of the antiquities of that island, and adds: “I hope soon to be able to publish some photographs, plans and notes unknown to historians as yet. The work I have undertaken is far from being accomplished; I have done much; I have yet more to do.”

Unless a great fraud has been practiced, the discovery of the statue of Chac-Mool is worthy of the enthusiastic reception which has been accorded to it in Yucatan. It is with the hope, that, by attracting public attention to his discovery, others may be induced to co-operate with Dr. Le Plongeon in his archæological investigations, that the writer has been led into this detailed account of his severe and long-continued scientific labors.